

So Old It's Brand Spanking New:
How to Organize an Excellent Argument from the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*
A Multi-Media Instructional Mash-Up

By Justin Thurman, PhD
Unlicensed Maker of Handouts & Distiller of Miracle Tonics

Of the many challenges facing first-year college writers, perhaps the most difficult is arranging evidence to best serve a central point. Sure, we could all use some additional work on our basic sentence grammar, perhaps a year or two studying punctuation and mechanics. Our usage—selecting the best word—would benefit from roughly five additional years of close, engaged reading of diverse texts. Clear, cogent writing on the sentence level is important, to be sure.

However, I have found that once students discover the constituent parts of a larger, sustained piece of writing, their ability to write, research, read, and observe at the college level truly blossoms. After all, when it comes to building anything—say, a nightstand from Ikea—we are generally supplied directions, a picture of what we're trying to build. Of course, the nightstand is in pieces in front of us and we need the correct tools and workspace to get it done. But we have a sense of direction and a goal. We can visualize the steps we need to take.

Compared to writing, a nightstand is easy to build. We know it doesn't work when a) it doesn't exactly look like the thing in the pictures, b) we have a bunch of leftover hardware and, c) the nightstand crumbles into bits when we place our lamp and books on it.

Oh, if writing were only as easy as making Ikea nightstands.

What you'll find here is something like a schematic to building a piece of academic discourse, a **heuristic** that may serve as a guide. This is the six-part arrangement strategy for classical orations drawn from the oldest extant Latin rhetoric manual, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* (84 B.C.E). Composed by an anonymous author, who may have been the Roman teacher and political consultant, Cicero¹ *The Rhetorica* became an influential text, specifically for instructors of Latin during the Renaissance.

Today, I'd like you to think of this arrangement strategy as a set of six forms into which you will pour the liquefied, molten goop of your brains. Then, you plug those pieces together

¹ Fun fact about Cicero: Mark Antony famously beheaded him because of an assumed political betrayal. Antony also ordered Cicero's hands be cut off and nailed to the forum's doors in Rome. Plutarch wrote a widely studied set of histories and "The Death of Cicero" is contained therein.

and, Presto! With some transitions and some focused, well-intentioned revision, you may have something that looks like an academic argument.

Now, it's important to see that these parts, or "moves," if you like, are not single paragraphs. They are tasks that could take several paragraphs. For example, the "exordium," or introductory move, can take anywhere from one to five paragraphs based on the scope of your subject. My exordium is eight short paragraphs I break to help me with the rhythm of a live reading.

Making the choice to move from section to section should be based on persuasive goals, not word, sentence, or paragraph count. Getting you to think in terms of purpose, getting us from "done work" to "good work," that is our aim with this history and writing lesson.

After the description of the six-part classical arrangement strategy, you'll find the oration I delivered with each of the parts identified. That's our nightstand, as it were.

It is my hope that by learning to execute these moves and think in terms of purpose, your anxieties about length will begin to dissipate. You'll see the spots in which your evidence is lacking, where the organizational symmetry isn't exactly lining up. And feeling empowered, you will take it upon yourself to do the *real work* that leads to better sentence-level command, more effective usage, and better grades: reading and writing. **A LOT.**

The Six-Part Oration²

PART ONE – The Exordium (Introduction): Journalists call this the “lede” or “the hook.” In Hacker’s and Sommers’s *A Writer’s Reference* (specifically page fifteen), they list eight different strategies. The key to a good hook is to capture the essence of the subject and your audience’s undivided attention. Establish your authority. When a hook doesn’t work, it’s generally because it has nothing to do with the other parts of the oration or it’s not funny, scary, sad, whatever.

The other characteristic of bad hooks? They’re *too fast* and not detailed enough. Remember: a hook is a move that could and should take at least a paragraph or two (mine takes seven paragraphs).

PART TWO – The Narration: Set forth the facts about the subject of debate. Here’s where you should capture *doxa*, or the mainstream conception of your subject. If you’re merely echoing that opinion or trafficking in clichés, we needn’t listen to what you have to say. You need to distinguish your position. How do you do that? See: Part Three – The Division.

PART THREE – The Division: The goal here is to draw lines and to categorize. In other words, **DEFINE YOUR TERMS** and **MAKE YOUR CLAIM!** Distinguish your position and break it into sub-topics. The definitive statement of your position and **HOW/WHY** that position is valid should be plain, clear, and uncompromising. Announce your point, purpose, and everything your audience can expect in the forthcoming **proof**³.

PART FOUR – The Proof: Here’s your evidence, organized in as many paragraphs as you need to make your case airtight and authoritative. Align the deployment of that proof with what you promised your audience in the Division.

PART FIVE – The Refutation: Devil’s advocate time! If you’re dealing with probabilities (as you should be. No sense spending all this time reporting facts), alternative opinions and approaches should be in abundance. Acknowledge each of these alternative opinions and answer them with more evidence. Strengthen your position.

PART SIX – The Peroration (Conclusion): You have three jobs here according to the *Rhetorica*: Sum up, amplify, and appeal to pity. Contrary to popular belief, however, summing up does not mean “repeat everything you just wrote using the thesaurus to make it look different.” No. Summing up means bringing it all full circle. Here, we may see the merits of an effective hook. If you planted a gun in your exordium (say, a cute little boy dressed like a Viking with a battle axe) here’s where you’d fire it⁴. Call your audience to action.

² I draw from, condense, paraphrase, and synthesize multiple sources: Richard Lanham’s *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*; Harry Caplan’s translation of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, reprinted in Bizzell and Herzberg’s *The Rhetorical Tradition*; and Jay Heinrich’s *Thank You For Arguing*.

³ The five-paragraph essay conflates the first three parts—exordium, narration, and division—into the introductory paragraph. The “body” paragraphs are analogous to the proof.

⁴ That’s a reference to Chekov. Look him up.

Giving the World Your Good Work: Writing Toward A Habit of Arête

by

Justin Thurman

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 8:34 PM

Comment: The seduction starts NOW! Title is organic to my argument, provides some of my key terms (habit; Arête).

[EXORDIUM] This here is a picture of my son, Calder. He's six and he likes animals, weapons, and building things. I am both proud and petrified of this picture. I'm proud because it's awesome. When I want to show someone my son, this is what that someone gets, Calder in his cardboard armor, wielding a homemade battle-axe. What petrifies me is this picture causes me to interrogate my parenting; it represents what I take to be the contradictory microcosm of what Mass American Culture means by excellence. On one hand, TV and school has taught me everyone should be excellent on his own terms and in his own ingenious little way. On the other, TV and school has taught me that to be excellent, one must be ready for ruthless battle.

Part one of this schizophrenic position is that everyone can and should be excellent. Half of me deplores this while the other half buys it wholesale. The half that deplores it feels like the outside world tells us that good work doesn't matter. For example, Calder's played soccer for the past three years and at the end of every year, he gets a trophy. All the kids get trophies. If he didn't get a trophy? He'd probably consider not playing anymore. I understand that he's six and that phase gets outgrown and, eventually, the everyone-gets-a-trophy mentality goes away.

Still. His shelf is lined with trophies. In the past three years I think he could lay claim to his team's winning maybe two games. I say "maybe" because we don't keep score. Not yet, anyway.

Now, I'm the furthest thing from a chest-beating, Darwinian, psycho-sport parent you'll find. But when everyone gets trophies, are we not withholding the savage facts of living in this

country? Are we not programming our children to accept cheap symbols in lieu of, say, actual victory? Actual food and money? Are we not shielding them from failure? From reality?

The good half of me that likes the “everyone’s excellent” line prefers its emphasis on teamwork, having a good time, and expressing one’s individuality. The good half rejects the fascination with keeping score. Because despite his Viking pose, Calder is a peaceful, loving, cerebral boy. He’s not aggressive. He is not, most sports parents would say, an excellent athlete.

He is an excellent communicator of very weird ideas. It is in this realm of weirdness where Calder possesses the most potential to give the world the gifts of his imagination. Check this out: he broke down all of his Legos to build a reenactment of his birth. The doctor is a mummy Lego figurine holding a sword. You know, for surgery. I’m Leonardo, the Ninja Turtle, reading a book. His grandfather is the nine-hundred-year-old Jedi master, Yoda. We huddle around his mother on her multi-colored Lego block bed, awaiting the emergence of our special Viking boy.

As his father, I am bound by blood to encourage and protect him. But I am also a writer and an artist myself. I can say unequivocally that his birth scene is good work. First of all, it’s novel. What six-year-old boy dismantles his toys to make not a new toy, but a *scene*? His intention here is not to tell *a* story, but *his* story. Nobody anywhere else could have done this. It radiates with the white-hot ring of truth. It was a self-directed exercise. Nobody promised him a cookie. He didn’t need to be bribed with points or grades or, as he’s started to demand now for tasks as simple as tying his shoes and changing his underwear, cash money. Something else motivated him to do it, something nobody can quantify. He’s puzzled why his sister was born naturally and why he needed to be extracted by a man with tools. He built us a monument to his

confusion and could not wait to share it. So far, this picture has generated almost seventy comments and likes on Calder's mother's Facebook page.

I wonder how many experts in technology, business, or healthcare would think Calder's sculpture is an excellent achievement, however. I wonder how many among us here would take the time to investigate this as a fascinating expression of a developing ego, an example of ingenuity.

[NARRATION] I do know that my teachers probably wouldn't have cared for something so unquantifiable, so ungradeable, so useless. Its value isn't measureable. One can't assess it. America's industrial education machine, values compliance over the inspiration of genuine feeling, conformity over inducing awe, The more thoughtless, afraid, sloppy, fast and competitive we all are, the better for everyone's bottom line. The indoctrination starts early and doesn't let up until we contemplate retirement, until we feel the great longing for something as vivid as our youth, until we wonder why we can't read for pleasure, why we don't draw or write or sing like we used to.

This indoctrination is unnatural. The fact that it takes about seventeen years to get the seed planted should be our first clue. Mine began in the first grade with a systematic encoding of what "excellence" means. I used to have to bring home peechee folders every Friday when I was in elementary school. Anyone else here have anything like that? Inside these deals were weekly conduct reports. I could be excellent (that was an "E"). Or I could be satisfactory (that was an "S"). Or I could need improvement (an "I"). And then there was the dreaded "U," which stood for unsatisfactory.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 8:58 PM

Comment: This marks the end of my Exordium. Notice the personal connection I'm trying to make with my audience. From an ETHOS perspective, much of my authority is handled off thepage with my credentials, publications, and history. I'm also laying the groundwork for an implicit appeal to PATHOS, or an emotional appeal: my lovely, weirdo son. Finally, I'm setting the stage for the CRUCIAL ISSUE: the misguided, popular conception of excellence.

I was a U machine. Maybe an “I” here and there. An “S” was attainable if I could keep my mouth shut. “E’s” were the rarest of species. And my teachers’ comments were like sea scrolls of my misbehavior. Fighting. Vulgar language. Talking out of turn.

My students can testify that I still act like this in class.

I can look back now and say my disruptive behavior was the product of my being inconsolably lonely and needing attention. I can look back and say I was unhappy and restless. These feelings, which I wrestle with daily as an adult, are far more important than spelling or geography. They really are. But, sadly, a schoolroom stuffed with thirty rowdy primitives isn’t the space to explore immeasurable outcomes like coping, generosity, grieving, or fear. I say this not to excuse my elementary school self. At the same time, to earn an E, one had to clean blackboards and pound erasers, sit still in regimented rows. To earn the gold star was to follow directions and kiss ass. While I can’t condone who I was then, if I had a choice between grabbing the E and being a conformist, or getting the U and being what I was, which was sad, angry, and bored, I’ll take the U.

The soul of that dissatisfied troublemaker is resurrected every time I sit down to write. Writing is my private rebellion. It means the world to me that some reader somewhere might someday care to join me. To me, that’s excellence.

To most everyone else, excellence is winning. High numbers. Speed. Efficiency. Focus. Single-mindedness. Calculation. Yet, to be excellent at what I do, which is write, debate, read, create, and teach, *none* of this is applicable. Literature is troublemaking in the service of catharsis. It’s upsetting the status quo. Literature is not learning how to be better cog. It’s an effort to awaken the cogs and cajole them to spin beautifully in a different, better direction.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:00 PM

Comment: There’s the narration. Now, because this is a public speech to first-year college students, I made the decision to couch more of this in personal experience. However, I’m banking on your being surprised that a guy with Dr. in front of his last name was such a pain in the butt. Another appeal to ETHOS. Both in my exordium and my narration, I’m doing my best to capture DOXA: the commonplace opinion of excellence. And then I’m going to dismantle it.

[DIVISION]

My charge here today is to position writing and literature as noble destroyers of excellence's popular connotation and propose that the excellence we were indoctrinated with in school and on TV, the excellence political windbags and corporate shysters assume whenever they sit for what passes for news these days, this excellence is in direct conflict with our basic humanity. If you think that excellence means to win at any cost or to find the highest paying job that demands the least amount of work? If you think that excellence will protect you from poverty, from danger, from having your soul under constant assault? You are going to take issue with what I have to say here today.

But the more time I spend with my children and observing the world they're going to have to grapple with, the more I'm convinced that the central challenge of education, especially in our current bloodless, profit-driven culture, is to know each other, to love each other, and to be excellent in a way that the market will not necessarily reward. Excellence is not being the best or accruing the most stuff. It's not diversifying your portfolio and finding a stable career. Excellence is not getting. It's certainly not deferring to some abstract, non-existent authority that will reward you with symbols when what you need is substance.

To be excellent is to remain human and to inspire others to do so in a culture that selects for the inhuman. Excellence is not a quality, it's a quest, or, as Aristotle believed, a habit. Like writing, it's a process of self-discovery punctuated by pain, suffering, and small moments of profound self awareness. You will not be excellent if you earn a college degree. You will not be excellent if you find a way to be comfortable. Quite the contrary. Excellence is uncomfortable. Excellence is failing at something into which you've dumped your heart and then making the decision to keep dumping in your heart, maybe dumping in more than your heart. Excellence is

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:01 PM

Comment: First signal of division. THEY say excellence is A,B,C, I SAY it's X, Y and Z.

giving. Excellence is slow, sloppy, confusing, heartbreaking *work* that will span your entire life.

And it is absolutely thrilling.

[PROOF] I have read this word, pronounced “Arête,” defined simply as excellence, or something along the lines of “being all one can be.” But if you dig into the etymology and read your Greek philosophy, Arête doesn’t map so elegantly onto English. Plato associated Arête with virtue, with courage. His most famous student, Aristotle, expanded upon this conception, linked it to another Greek concept, *eudemonia*, or a happiness arrived upon through a life governed by reason in the service of good.

But here’s the thing: everybody’s more different than you can imagine. Our lives are mosaics of varied experiences and memories. Therefore, within all of us are different capacities for good and different reasons to be good. And what is a good life? How can we get it? According to Plato and Aristotle, knowledge, study, and contemplation are the only ways there. In other words, what we call excellence is subjective. Each person is responsible for his own definition.

Subjectivity notwithstanding, Aristotle and Plato were fairly adamant about what Arête is not. It is not wealth. It is not pleasure. It is not fame, or honor. It is not another trophy. Most of us discover too late that all the stuff and friends in the world will not make us happy. Worse still, to confuse consumption with Arête is amoral. Working for rewards is *not* excellent. It is living to receive, not produce, which violates the first of Aristotle’s three lives of good society.

Now, choice is the fuel and the fire of our Arête quests. Let’s put aside the fuel and focus on the fire. The mighty gods of the marketplace have provided more than enough distractions to fool us into thinking we’re excellent. Gizmos. Gadgets. Rings. Shoes. Dance moms and duck call makers and twerking starlets on six-foot TVs. Degrees, certificates, and meaningless titles.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:02 PM

Comment: This paragraph outlines my CENTRAL CLAIM. I’m defining my terms exactly, providing a list that hints at the structural integrity of the PROOF.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:03 PM

Comment: Proof point one: everyone who thinks they know what excellence means really doesn’t know. Plato and Aristotle (names that carry some philosophical heft) THEY know. Again: ETHOS. Respect my authority!

Sadly, we take these as ends in themselves, symbols of our superiority. Make no mistake: working for goodies will burn you up and put the suppliers of these goodies in a position of power over you.

Here's a goody for which many of us will happily bark like trained seals: grades. External validation is not just money, folks. It's any recognition from outside your own skull, someone else saying you've done good and have the stuff. Justifiably you equate excellence with scoring points. Yet, as anyone who has ever pursued an advanced degree will tell you, exceptional people are not supposed to get good grades. They're supposed to get *perfect* grades. In law school? In medical school? Good grades are not a goal. They're assumed equipment. Students who obsess about their grades invariably have mediocre ones. On one level, this obsession comes from anxiety and confusion. Deep down, many of us are not confident that we fundamentally understand or enjoy knowledge making and gathering.

On a second and more serious level, the drive for grades has wired us to get rather than give. We don't know what it means to do *good work*. So we compensate by doing whatever we can to achieve the symbol of good work. That's why we cheat. It's why we lie and ask for extra credit (more work) even though we don't necessarily understand or excel at the existing work.

None of this behavior is excellent. It's not even adequate. It's desperate.

Another act of desperation that is usually linked to the misguided pursuit of grades is haste. Again: to compensate for a lack of understanding about quality—and ourselves, really—we figure that if we can't be good, we can at least be first. OR afraid to face the reality that we haven't been present or paying sufficient attention, afraid of the truth that we haven't established a real connection, we put off the work. Procrastination forces us into a situation in which we have no choice but to be fast.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:04 PM

Comment: Proof point two: Because the definition of excellence has been misappropriated by a self-directed, materialistic mainstream culture, we are obsessed not with good work, but with grades.

“But I work better under pressure,” we say. And in a way, we’re right. It gets the thing done. But that’s all it is: done. That’s all we can objectively claim about the work and our effort. We don’t know if it’s good or if it makes the world a better place. Sometimes, we don’t even like it ourselves. Ever written something that you’ve hated? Or, worse, something that you have no feeling about whatsoever? But we certainly want something for it, don’t we? Let’s haggle about grade percentages, then. Let’s find out what it may be worth even though we know it’s worthless.

In the end, however, the major reason we don’t do good work is that we don’t know what “good work” means. Here’s where I can speak to my experience as a writer and a teacher of writing. People often ask me what I get paid for publishing a story or an article in an academic journal. “How much money can one expect from a book?” they ask. I’m here to tell you: for most of us writers, it’s not enough to buy a cheeseburger a year for the rest of our lives. That’s not why I write. That’s not why J.K. Rowling, probably the richest author ever, does it. What fuels my desire to do good work is a deep dissatisfaction with how I’m developing as an agent of *Arête*. Most of the time, I come to the conclusion that my major failing is that I worry too much about myself. Writing well is an exercise that commands a bionic emotional compass and imagination. Self-absorption is not an option. I do not write for money. I write to be a better father, husband, and teacher. That seldom has anything to do with my own comfort.

Grade obsession, procrastination, haste, half-assed work, most of our bad habits stem from self-absorption. In one of the greatest commencement speeches ever, David Foster Wallace argued to Kenyon College’s graduating class that the purpose of education is to think past one’s self and immediate superficial needs. He concedes it is the hardest thing in the world to do. Again: this is why I’ve chosen writing as my life’s charge. Good work means making a sincere

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:05 PM

Comment: Proof point three: SPEED. They say excellence is accruing the most goodies (grades) in the fastest way possible. Doesn’t lend itself to good work. I say slow down and take time to care.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:05 PM

Comment: Ethos (appeal to authority)

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:07 PM

Comment: Reminding the audience of the points I’ve covered. Building a ramp up to my clean-up hitter: SELF-ABSORPTION (point four of the proof).

effort to see that other people suffer, that suffering is valuable. And nobody should be discounted. Nobody is just another nobody. Nobody is just a dishwasher or a waitress, or a teacher, or a student. Doing good work means mustering the guts to admit that all that separates us from the incarcerated criminal or the victims of poverty and warfare is LUCK. Doing good work means exerting all our intellectual and emotional powers to take and use the unavoidable bad news of living. Doing good work means imagining how through science and art we can preserve the best parts of our humanity, it means working to give.

To stay alert to every opportunity to give good work, to love hard every day, this is how I've defined my quest for Arête. I don't care if I finish first. And I certainly don't care if anyone else approves.

[REFUTATION] Now, as I'm learning in my classrooms, we have a lot of athletes in the crowd. And despite my own history as a two-sport athlete, my definition of good work is informed by my desire to be a great writer and thinker. This desire has very little to do with sports. I imagine at least one of you out in the crowd, the one who's still awake anyway, saying to herself, "My Arête will be as a professional bowler." Athletics are worthy endeavors. The lessons sport imbues about compromise, discipline, and teamwork are valuable. And achieving Arête in the athletic arena is certainly possible.

But it is so very, very rare and difficult.

Here's the reason: The American obsession with sports would wither without constant mass displays of external validation. Everyone involved in an athletic event is receiving something on a primal level. The spectators receive pleasure. The teams earn points, wins, goals. But do we honestly watch and play because we love the games? Or do we watch and play because it's an easy place for attention? Or do we do it because it provides an arena in which we

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:08 PM

Comment: BOOM! Pathos (appeal to emotion). Restatement of the central claim. Re-definition (but not a contradiction) of the claim I made in the DIVISION.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:08 PM

Comment: Ethos.

can dominate because, outside that arena, we are dominated and need to feel powerful? Keep these questions in mind as you devote your body, your brain, and your time to this enterprise. By all means, play sports. Be great athletes. But do it because exercise is good for your mind and its participation augments your quest to do good work, not because it's the only place where you feel you can get recognition and inflate your ego at the expense of someone else.

In my experience, athletics is also not a domain that promotes kindness. The same goes for business. Both collapse without competition. I played high school football, was an all-state defensive back, and I was most effective when I was mean, when I suppressed my fear of injuring myself and others, when I took unconscious risks. For much of the past decade, something like this savage drive to win turned perfectly decent bankers and loan officers, your human neighbors, into predators and brought our entire country to the brink of financial ruin. This so-called economic crisis that has so many parents pushing their kids into “stable” majors was and is a crisis not of economy, but of compassion, of an entire system of checks and balances predicated on the assumption that everyone's in the game to win. Not to give, but to get.

Because of this anxiety about jobs and financial stability, students often wonder why they should bother reading literature or writing at all. “Where am I going to do this with my job?” they ask. One of my answers is that art, especially literature, the most profound and purest persuasive language act, is one of the few remaining endeavors that values emotional truth over material gains. Of course the arts confuse and scare the profit-minded. Drama, drawing, sculpture, acting, literature, expression, these all teach us how to feel. And the corporate exploitation of your potential not as a creator, but as a consumer, will go unimpeded if you ever forget how to feel. It's easier not to feel, in fact. Never forget that feeling is an intellectual exercise. Love is not coded into our DNAs. It is learned.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:08 PM

Comment: Ethos.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:09 PM

Comment: Notice how I don't avoid this commonplace indictment of the arts. Instead, I cite it and I use it.

[PERORATION]

Writing is learning how to love by asking and seeking answers to the most difficult questions. Why do I lie when I know it's wrong? Why am I more interested in my phone and crazy cat videos than my best friend or my family? Why do I regret that time I wept publicly at my mother-in-law's funeral? Why is vengeance and anger so easy? Why is mercy so hard? Why does the hair on the back of my neck stand up whenever I hear T.S. Eliot's Prufrock say, "I have seen the moment of my greatest flicker, / And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid"?

These are only one-one-millionth of the questions that animate my troublemaking. There is violence, loneliness, chaos, confusion, and sadness. But we also work in a world of selflessness, of love, of courage. Each is an abstract probability that we know exists, that we've *seen* exists. But we have yet to know *how* and *why* they exist.

Higher education is not about getting you a stable job. It's about nurturing what the fiction writer George Saunders calls "that luminous part of [us] that exists beyond personality." Higher education should be about changing the automatic tendency to view everything through your own self-centered lens, to discount the complicated, lonely lives of your strangers, your "default setting" as David Foster Wallace called it. Higher education should be about cultivating "radical empathy" as the author Steve Almond tabbed it. Higher education is about enduring, it's about caring, and it's about doing good work in the absence of stability and easy answers. My job is to help you teach yourself better habits. The most important of those habits is to pay attention to your life in such a way that you are always looking to give the world your good work.

So if you want to be excellent, don't aim for good grades. Don't aim for speed. Don't aim to just get something done. Don't even aim to be the best. Aim to be a peaceful, attentive Viking

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:13 PM

Comment: Sum up. Amplify. Stir the emotions (or appeal to pity). But we need a ramp to that conclusion. What follows is that ramp with some shout outs to everyone from whom I stole these ideas. Repetition of grammatical structure counts as AMPLIFICATION in this context.

who builds Lego reenactments of his own birth, not because it may win an award, but because it's funny and cool and it may brighten an embittered lonely world. Aim for good work. Aim for mercy. Always.

Justin Thurman 9/19/13 9:12 PM

Comment: Sum up. Amplify. Appeal to pity.